

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*Below is my response to the question provided for the **Ask The Religion Experts** feature in this Sunday's **Ottawa Citizen**. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

Sunday, June 3, 2012

Q : How does your faith regard inter-religious dialogue?

A : As a faith which has been a "guest" in dozens of nations, each with their own indigenous faiths, Buddhism has embraced inter-faith dialogue since its earliest times. Typical of most Asian faiths, it has dialogued with, borrowed from, transformed and been transformed by many. Since it has never claimed exclusive access to or possession of the Truth, it has no territory to protect.

In fact, it is characteristic of Buddhist teaching to embrace two principles. First, we are taught not to hold any views as the final ultimate Truth. The Buddha himself is quoted as advising all seekers to follow the Buddhaway if they have confidence in it. If they can find another teaching which not only promises but delivers as his does, they ought embrace that heartily. Secondly, in his major teaching, The Eight Steps to Satisfaction, he advises us to cultivate an openness to multiple perspectives. As the well-known metaphor goes, if four people are examining an elephant through four different holes in a fence, they will each be equally convinced this creature is a mass of grey wrinkles, some long snakiness, bird-like flappy wings or a flyswatter. Each perspective contributes to our fully understanding.

In our congregation, we have set interfaith dialogue as our study theme for this year. We have established a connection with a United Church congregation in Nova Scotia whereby we explore a different religious theme each month. The ministers make a comment on the

theme and share it, then share their reply. The congregations get to read or hear the dialogue and share their views with each other online. So far we have considered issues of suffering and the nature of the founder to name but two.

Members of both congregations have found the process extremely valuable in adding new dimensions to their understanding. I spoke with one of our community who participates regularly in our services and maintains a similar interest in her Christian church. Through this dialogue, she explained to me, she has come to much deeper understanding of her own religious faith, and how it can overlap both faith traditions without contradiction.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

This and all other contributors' responses are available on the Citizen's online blog:

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>

All my past 52 columns are available online at:

<http://www.realperson.com/ARE.htm>

We invite you to consider this response and share your own on our Red Maple Leaflet blog at <http://www.redmaplesangha.blogspot.com>